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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRISTINA 000813

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SUBJECT: KOSOVO ELECTIONS: PDK WINS MORE MAYORSHIPS, BUT
LDK TAKES PRISTINA

Classified By: COM TINA KAIDANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: According to preliminary results issued December 9 by the OSCE, Hashim Thaci's PDK party won 14 of the 23 municipalities up for grabs in the December 8 mayoral run-offs in Kosovo. President Sejdiu's LDK party won 6 -- including Pristina -- while Ramush Haradinaj's AAK party won 13. Though conditional and mail-in ballots still need to be counted, our sources say they are unlikely to affect the outcome of any municipality, with the possible exception of Obilic. From assessments by our 7 USOP observer teams and discussions with OSCE, Central Election Commission officials and others, the vote went off well and was conducted in a peaceful atmosphere. However, the 32 percent turnout was even lower than in the first round, and virtually no Kosovo Serbs voted. Winning Pristina by a large margin (nearly 59 percent) has given the LDK party, the overall biggest loser in these elections, a much-needed shot in the arm as formal coalition talks begin with the PDK on forming a new government. END SUMMARY.

PDK Wins again in peaceful, smooth process

12. (SBU) On December 9, OSCE issued preliminary results for the December 8 mayoral run-offs in 23 municipalities that gave Hashim Thaci's PDK party the largest number of positions, 14. President Sejdiu's LDK party followed with six, including Pristina, and Ramush Haradinaj's AAK consolidated its power base in western Kosovo by winning the mayorships of Decan, Peja and Gjakova. (Note: Preliminary results do not include conditional and mail-in ballots, but our sources say this is unlikely to affect the outcome in any municipality, with the possible exception of the tight PDK-LDK race in Obilic. End Note.)

13. (SBU) Overall, assessments from our 7 USOP observer teams and discussions with OSCE, Central Election Commission (CEC) officials and others indicated a smooth process conducted in a peaceful atmosphere. Unlike the first round on November 17, voters this time had a simple choice between two candidates to make, rather than the complicated three-election ballot given to them. Turnout at 32 percent,

however, was even lower than in the first round, and virtually no Kosovo Serbs voted in the southern enclaves, even though OSCE mobile election units were available in Serb villages located in Albanian-majority municipalities. (Note: There were no run-offs in the three northern Serb-majority municipalities, nor in Novo Brdo or Strpce, two municipalities with large Serb populations. These were dealt with separately by executive decision of the SRSG. End Note.)

Highlights

¶4. (SBU) Some highlights of the mayoral races include LDK deputy chairman Eqrem Kryeziu losing his bid for re-election as mayor of Prizren by a fairly large margin to PDK challenger Ramadan Muja (55 to 45 percent), while LDK Culture Minister Astrit Haraqija was beaten handily in his hometown of Gjakova by PDK challenger, Pal Lekaj (56 to 43 percent). On the PDK side, up-and-comer MP Enver Hoxhaj lost big in Sukareka to the LDK candidate.

LDK at least wins Pristina

¶5. (SBU) In what appeared to be a closely-fought battle for Pristina, LDK candidate and respected economist Isa Mustafa had no difficulty with PDK deputy chairman Fatmir Limaj, winning 59 to 41 percent. Another PDK deputy chairman, Hajredin Kuci, told us that Limaj had phoned Mustafa to congratulate him on his victory. At a celebration in Pristina on election night, PDK chairman Thaci addressed the party faithful with the popular Limaj at his side, and the crowds chanted "Limaj for President" and "No coalition with the LDK." (Note: In the Kosovo Assembly vote on November 17, Limaj was the second top vote-getter after Thaci, beating even President Sejdiu in overall number of votes. End Note.)

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¶6. (C) COMMENT: Overall, these mayoral run-offs were another PDK victory, yet the big win in Pristina gives the LDK a much-needed shot in the arm as all eyes now turn to the beginning of formal coalition talks led by the PDK. Given the demands of the final status process, we will continue to urge the PM-designate, Hashim Thaci, to conclude these talks quickly and establish a government as soon as possible. END COMMENT.

KAIDANOW